



Frene Ginwala



Sheila Meintjes

The Women's National Coalition and The “Women's Charter for Effective Equality”

In the history of women’s organisations in South Africa there have been many attempts to create enduring structures. The table below, compiled from searches on the Internet, lists some 15 of the principal ones.

Another source is a book. Twenty-four years after Cheryl Walker’s 1982 book “Women and Resistance in South Africa”, Shireen Hassim in 2006 produced “Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority”, published by University of Wisconsin Press. Useful parts of this book can be read through Google Books.

Hassim’s book contains a lot of detail on the way that these and other women’s organisations came about, who was involved, those relationships and problems that motivated their formation, and those that led to their demise.



FEDTRAW Calendar, 1987

Hassim notes that Walker's book was well known to important actors during the UDF period (roughly, 1983-1990), when problems arose that were similar to those that Walker described as existing between the FSAW and the ANC Women's League in the 1950s.

Among others, the table lists six different organisations that were formed between 1981 and 1991, not including the FSAW (Fedsaw), which was also the subject of an attempted revival. These seven attempts, which were not the only ones, corresponded in time with the rise and fall of the United Democratic Front, the UDF.

In addition, the ANC and the SACP were legalised in February, 1990, and the ANC Women's League was quick to return to the country and to re-establish itself.

Of all these, total eight, organisations, established or re-established in the country between 1981 and 1991, the only

one that survives in 2013 is the ANC Women's League. None of the others survived beyond the early 1990s.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Leaders</u>
1918	Bantu Women's League (BWL)	Founded by Charlotte Maxeke
1933	National Council of African Women (NCAW)	First President: Charlotte Maxeke
1943	The ANC officially admits women members	President, A B Xuma
1948	ANC Women's League (ANCWL)	Ida Mtwana, President
1954	Federation of South African Women (FSAW)	Ray Alexander, Dora Tamana, Josie Mphama
1955	Black Sash (Women's Defence of the Constitution League)	Jean Sinclair, Ruth Foley and others
1975	Black Women's Federation	Fatima Meer, Winnie Mandela
1981	The United Women's Organisation (UWO)	Dora Tamana, Mildred Lesia, Amy Thornton
1983	Natal Organisation of Women (NOW)	Phumzile Mlambo, Nozizwe Madlala, Victoria Mxenge
1984	Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTAW)	Sister Bernard Ncube, Jessie Duarte
1986	United Women's Congress (UWCO)	From UWO
1987	Federation of South African Women (Fedsaw) re-launch	Cheryl Carolus, Secretary-General
1987	The UDF Women's Congress	Frances Baard
1991	Women's National Coalition (WNCSA)	Frene Ginwala, Anne Letsepe, convenors
2006	Progressive Women's Movement (PWMSA)	Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Mummy Japhta

The organisation that the attached and linked document relates to is the “**Women's National Coalition**”. It was a vehicle for intervention in the CODESA talks and for the creation of a set of demands or suggestions that were used to lobby the ANC prior to the 1994 elections, and then after the elections, as an input to the Constitution-writing process that followed.

The creation of the Women's National Coalition was driven by Frene Ginwala, who became Speaker of Parliament after the elections, and later by the academic Sheila Meintjes. The

structure was more like an NGO (funded from Canada) than a democracy, and the method of collecting a mandate, described in the document as “focus groups”, was a difficulty and occasioned acrimonious internal strife, according to Hassim.

The document includes a description found on the Internet, and the Women’s National Coalition’s “Women's Charter for Effective Equality”, taken from the ANC web site. There is no reference to the original Women’s Charter of 1954, or to the Federation of South African Women that created it, and which organised the women’s march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on the 9th of August 1956. This conspicuous omission has continued to be common.

In between the mid-1990s when the Women’s National Coalition faded, and 2006, there was no claimant to the status of a national South African women’s organisation. In 2006 the Progressive Women’s Movement was launched, claiming to fulfil this requirement. Whether it does so, or not, is the matter that is set out for examination in the next item of this part of the course.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Women’s National Coalition and its Charter for Effective Equality](#).
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